LEWIS THEOBALD.

A Portrait of this uſeful critick is among the deſiderata of thoſe Gentlemen who cultivate the *fermes ornées* of literature, and embelliſh the plays of *Shakſpeare* with a ſeries of characteriſtick prints, engraved and publiſhed by the ingenious Mr. S. HARDING, of Pall-mall.

An acknowledged painting, however, of Mr. *Theobald*, has hitherto eſcaped reſearch. His ſon, indeed, has been heard to ſay, that no reſemblance of him had been preſerved. This deficiency may therefore prove a laſting one, unleſs conjecture, fortified by coincidence, be allowed to fill a vacant picture-frame in our Gallery of Editors. Where the appropriate drug is wanting, the moſt ſcrupulous phyſicians will not refuſe to employ a ſuccedaneum; and I have been told of a Peer, in whoſe library all the loſt authors of Greece and Rome have their repreſentatives in wood backed with leather.

The neceſſities of Mr. *Theobald* (who was a prolifick dramatiſt, and yet always poor) are ſufficiently underſtood from advertiſements iſſued out by himſelf, at different periods, in the newspapers, ſoliciting his friends, in conſequence of his misfortunes, to take tickets for his benefit. His laſt addreſs to the Publick was delivered in a moſt humble ſtrain of ſupplication,

cation, and appeared in the *London Daily Poſt*, May 13, 1741.*

But a few years before, the inimitable *Hogarth*, who peopled his ſcenes with real as well as fictitious perſonages, had produced his celebrated print entitled the *Diſtreſſed Poet*; and in it the following circumſtances indicative of Mr. *Theobald* (at leaſt more immediately applicable to him than any other perſon) could not fail to have attracted notice.

To the firſt impreſſions of this plate, the annexed paſſage from the *Dunciad* is ſubjoined as a motto:

> " Studious he ſat, with all his books around,
> " Sinking from thought to thought, a vaſt profound!
> " Plung'd for his ſenſe, but found no bottom there,
> " And writ, and flounder'd on, in mere deſpair:"

And it is well known, that theſe lines, though ſince applied to *Cibber*, were originally part of Mr. *Pope's* very ſevere and exaggerated deſcription of *Theobald*.

Our unfortunate bard (I continue my reference to the firſt impreſſions from the plate) is likewiſe engaged in writing a poem entitled *Poverty*. Now, it is remarkable, that one of the earlieſt of Mr. *Theobald's* productions was the *Cave of Poverty*, a poem.

Over the head of the *Diſtreſſed Poet* (in the firſt impreſſions alſo) is ſtuck up a repreſentation of Mr. *Pope* in the act of beating

* It is dated from *Wynham's Court*, Great Ruſſel-ſtreet, Bloomſbury; but this place having been ſince built over, it is impoſſible to aſcertain the preciſe ſituation of

> " —— the Egerian grot,
> " Where, nobly penſive, *Theobald* ſat and thought;"

where he ſometimes *collated* his wiſhes for a good dinner with his ſlender means to procure it, while his wife was employed in *reſtoring* a loſt button to his breeches, or producing a neat *emendation* in his worſted ſtockings.

ing *Curll* the Bookſeller, who had offended him not only by the publication of his Letters, but by perſonal abuſe. This occurrence therefore might have been introduced as an admonition to *Theobald*, who had perſiſted in taking equal liberties with the tranſlator of *Homer*. * It is obvious alſo, that the inſtrument of Mr. *Pope's* retaliation on our hero, the *Grub-ſtreet Journal*, appears on the floor of the *Diſtreſſed Poet's* aërial citadel.

Hogarth, though at that time a powerful ſatiriſt, had not yet attained the ſummit of his reputation, and conſequently might have thought it no impolitick meaſure, to join the intereſts of the inquiſitor-general of the day; a practice familiar enough to other wits, viz. *Bramſton*, *Mallet*, &c. who were always ready to adopt the enmities of *Pope*, and return a ſervile echo to his invectives againſt *Cibber*, *Theobald*, and other objects of his poetical reſentment.

But not to dwell too long on ſuch inferences, a degree of reſpect is always due to conjecture, where no certainty can be obtained. Till therefore, what I am now offering to the publick as a probable reſemblance of Mr. *Theobald*, can be diſplaced by an indiſputable and authentick portrait of him †, let me hope that the annexed copy from *Hogarth* may be allowed to fill a place

* When *Hogarth* (as the very intelligent Mr. *Nichols* obſerves) republiſhed this plate in 1740, he effaced the lines already quoted, converted the *Triumphs of Pope* into the *Gold Mines of Peru*, and the *Poem on Poverty* into an *Eulogium on Riches*. Why theſe changes ſhould have been made, I cannot eaſily gueſs, unleſs the circumſtances already pointed out were conſidered as perſonal reflections, and as ſuch were reſented by our hero, whoſe ſecond edition of *Shakſpeare*, in that very year, had confirmed his victory over *Pope* as a commentator. The known diſtreſs of poor *Theobald* might, indeed, have proved his beſt advocate on this occaſion, and inclined *Hogarth* to obliterate the chiefly offenſive traits he had introduced in his repreſentation of an indigent rhymer.

† But a few years ago, a plate by *Vandergucht*, exhibiting an unpubliſhed portrait of the famous *John Dennis*,* was diſcovered. It may be ſuppoſed that in the year 1718, he had agreed for this plate as a faſhionable adjunct to his works in two volumes octavo; but that, being unable to pay for

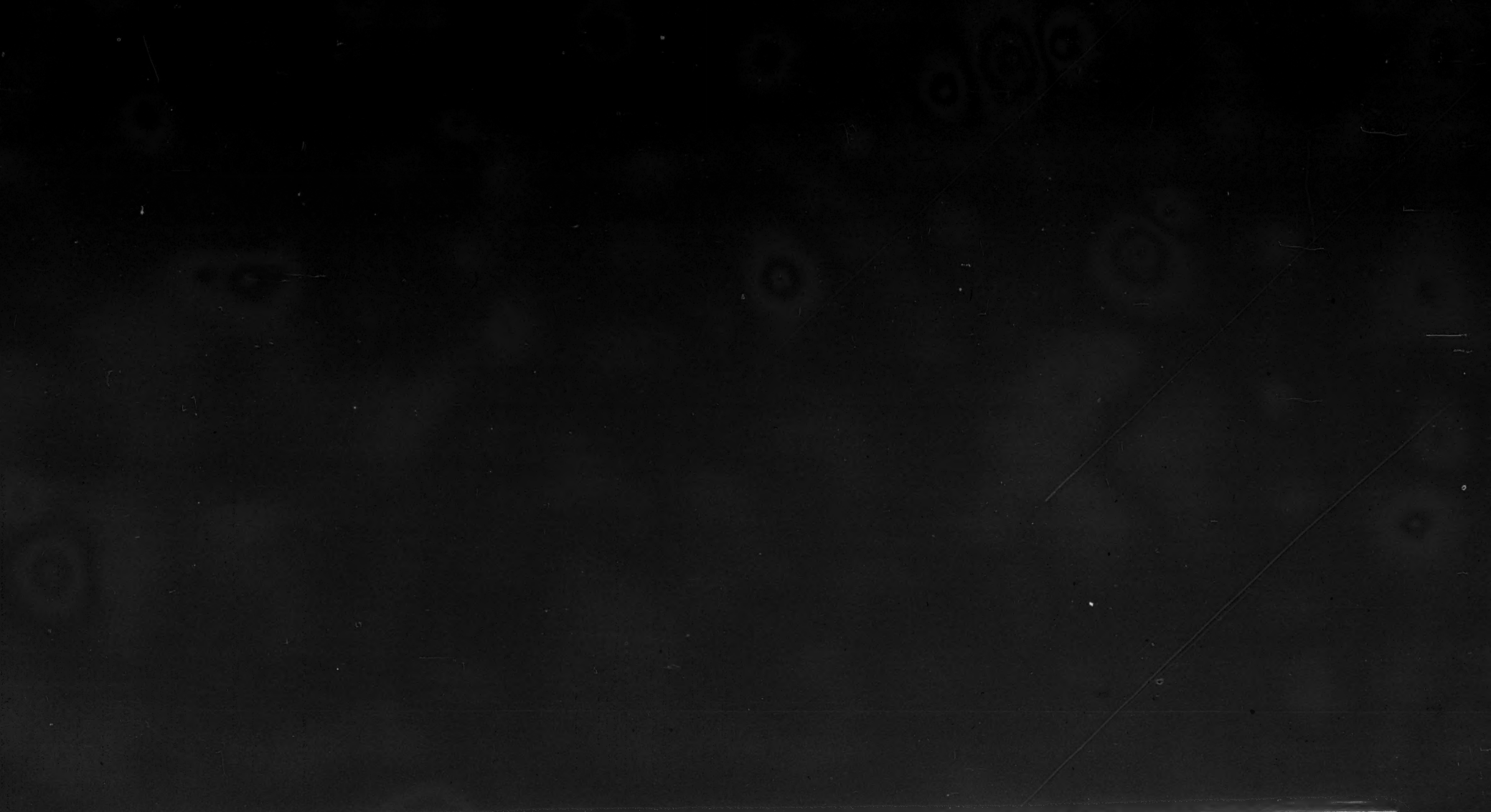
place in the train of *Shakſperian* ſatellites. Such a plea, perhaps, will not be charged with preſumption by thoſe who reflect how often they have admitted heads of exalted rank, on authority leſs deciſive than is here brought forward to identify an humble portrait. At the ſame time, let me avow my belief that many of our modern collectors (to whoſe liberality of conduct I am bound in gratitude to expreſs my ſincereſt obligations) will not merely confeſs that they have now and then ſubmitted to receive ideal likeneſſes, but will voluntarily add, like *Falſtaff*, that they are happy in entertaining "a number of ſuch ſhadows to fill up their muſter-books;" and had rather enliſt a recruit of queſtionable pretenſions, than, by diſcharging him, create a vacancy in the regiment they are ambitious to complete.

WILLIAM RICHARDSON.

Caſtle-ſtreet, Jan. 4, 1794.

it, it was withheld, and by mere accident eſcaped from being hammered out, or otherwiſe diſpoſed of as a piece of antiquated copper. It is not, therefore, impoſſible that ſome head of Mr. *Theobald*, which had been engraved and ſuppreſſed for ſimilar reaſons, may hereafter be found, and inſtead of overthrowing my conjecture, may only ſerve to confirm it. W. R.

* Very accurately copied by *Clamp*, in the laſt number of the *Shakſperian* prints publiſhed by Meſſieurs *Harding*.



W.m Hogarth pinx.t

LEWIS THEOBALD.

Studious he sate, with all his books around,
Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profund:
Plung'd for his sense, but found no bottom there;
Then writ, and flounder'd on, in mere despair.

Dunciad *Book 1. line 3.*

Pub.d Jan.y 20.th 1794 by W.m Richardson Castle S.t Leicester Fields.